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Singles Go On-Line for Love at P.A. Gathering

By Mary Madlson
Special to The Chronicle

Remember when you got a date and maybe a mate by seeing a stranger across a crowded room?

Those enchanted evenings may be fading into romantic history. The latest method of meeting the man or woman of your dreams is high-tech: Send personal messages through cyberspace, bounce a few lines of longing back and forth until you think you've found a soul mate.

Then after the messages get longer, a face-to-face meeting may be arranged, with the hope that love will bloom.

About 200 singles came to Palo Alto last Friday night to attend what was billed as the world's first conference on meeting your true love via the World Wide Web.

"There's no excuse for anyone being

single anymore unless that's what they want," said Daniel Bender, who spoke on "Finding Love in Cyberspace."

Bender is the founder of Cupid's Network, the world's largest on-line system of "romantic eligibles," which he defined as people who are ready and available for romance.

Bender, 34, is a Los Angeles computer consultant who met his 24-year-old wife by sending messages through cyberspace. Today, they are the parents of a 7-month-old boy.

Using the Internet and other computer networks, such as Prodigy and America Online, thousands, if not millions, of people all over the world are sending messages they hope will attract a perfect partner.

Cupid's Network is receiving more than 20,000 "hits" a day. A hit is counted

each time a person accesses the network.

About 75 percent of hopefuls are men, and most users are in their 20s and 30s, although men and women into their 70s also use the service. Bender said many more men than women tap into the network, partly because they are more oriented to the technology and partly because society still expects men to take the first step in romance.

Bender warned that there are hazards. Singles who write on the network should not reveal their full identities or where they live or work until they are sure they are dealing with a stable person.

He advised users to communicate solely with messages on the computer and get to know their new contact well for at least a month before graduating to telephone

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calls. Even then, singles should be vigilant in noticing odd behavior or inconsistencies.

At least two women have suffered because they gave their addresses and telephone numbers too soon to men writing them in the network. In one case, a man became obsessed with his new computer friend; another man pounded on a woman's door at 3 a.m., shouting accusations.

The computer contact is intended to keep the parties separated while they are getting acquainted. "Many people are too timid to start finding out about someone the minute they meet them in person, but doing it over the computer, at a distance, lets you know someone very well and very quickly," he said.

Once both members of a couple agree that they want to meet, Bender advises that it be in a public place, like a restaurant. "Then the only question left is whether or not there is physical chemistry, which you can usually tell right away," he said.

■ Cupid's Network is affiliated with American Singles, a nationwide nonprofit organization. To reach Bender and communicate with Cupid's Network, computer users may access the World Wide Web through the code: URL:<http://www.cupidnet.com/cupid>. The Bay Area branch of American Singles, located in San Rafael, may be reached by calling (415) 456-5683.